

## ■ Introduction

A critical component in the *Forward 2020* planning process was the development of a clearly articulated community-wide vision for the future of Columbia County. This was accomplished through a variety of public participation efforts including an opinion gathering survey, a series of community workshops, an interactive website, and continuous oversight by a Steering Committee comprised of stakeholders representing a diversity of business, service, institutional and residential interests in the County.

## ■ Columbia County's Vision for the Future

*In the year 2020, Columbia County will be a blend of premier communities in which to invest, live, work, and raise a family. It will be a place where residents enjoy a rich quality of life based on self-renewal to achieve the highest level of education, an appropriate range of housing options, first-rate shopping and entertainment, progressive employment opportunities, abundant natural resources, state-of-the-art community facilities and recreational amenities. All of these elements will be organized within a rational framework of development nodes linked by innovative transit and a comprehensive system of well-maintained streets, sidewalks, bikeways and multi-use trails.*

The Columbia County Growth Management Plan communicates a vision for the future based on a strategy of focused growth in clearly identified development nodes located throughout the County. By actively concentrating future development in pre-selected strategic locations, the intent is to create a series of community centers where inevitable growth is managed at a human scale and where new development is encouraged to integrate living, working, shopping, and playing in close proximity to one another. While this approach is fundamentally pro-growth in nature, it seeks to preserve the existing rural character prevalent in the western half of the County, to protect valuable natural resources, and to enhance the quality of life in this thriving community. Furthermore, this strategy of directed development strives to maximize the efficient and economical provision of county services and community facilities by coordinating development efforts with service areas.

It is acknowledged that opportunities for successfully implementing this strategy are greatest in the undeveloped areas of the county where the existing "clean slate" minimizes obstacles to integrated land uses within a comprehensive system of vehicular and pedestrian circulation. However, within the urbanized areas of the county, particularly Martinez-Evans, this strategy is equally valid as a means to mitigate the negative impact of unchecked commercial development along established major corridors by focusing on urban design initiatives that would enhance the public environment, link established uses, and protect diminishing open space.

## ■ Columbia County Compass

The initial phase of community visioning was initiated by the presentation of an opinion gathering survey to residents and stakeholders at a number of public meetings held throughout the County in January and February 2000. The survey, called the *Columbia County Compass*, presented community stakeholders with a wide range of questions, as well as images that they rated in terms of their desirability and appropriateness as models for future development in the County. Images were grouped by type in the following categories: Housing, Commerce, Public Environment, and Transportation. Additionally, basic demographics were compiled in order to create a profile of survey respondents. All demographic information was completely anonymous and used only for the purpose of providing a frame of reference in which to analyze the data.

### Housing

The highest-ranking images in the Housing category featured traditional single-family homes on large, well-landscaped lots. This is not surprising due to the fact that many residents cited the quality of life afforded by abundant new housing stock and vast open space as primary reasons for moving to Columbia County. In contrast, housing images that received low scores were typically higher density, including three and four story apartment complexes and attached single-family units. Minimal landscaping and poorly designed parking areas contributed to the lack of visual appeal of these images.

### Commerce

Commercial land use images that scored high included small-scale commercial buildings with awnings and decorative lights that contributed to their storefront appeal. Similarly, images of retail stores arranged along pedestrian arcades or wide sidewalks scored well. However, images of shops that appeared to have only parallel parking out front did not receive positive scores. The lowest ranking commercial images portrayed light industrial uses or big box retail chain stores with oceans of parking along established commercial strips. In Columbia County, much of this type of development is concentrated along the Washington Road corridor in Martinez and has long been identified as the epitome of sprawl.

### Public Environment

Images featuring the County's natural resource amenities such as the Savannah River and Clarks Hill Lake were among the highest-ranking in the public environment category. Additionally, images of pristine open spaces such as pastures and other undeveloped parcels received high scores. The abundance of open space in the county and the opportunity to live in close proximity to natural resources that can be utilized for recreational pursuits such as boating, hiking and camping strengthen the county's appeal for residents and regional tourists alike. In contrast, the images in this category that received low scores included poorly designed community facilities in need of expansion and public infrastructure elements such as water towers. These images reflect the challenges faced by the County in terms of providing public services efficiently to a rapidly growing population.

## Transportation

In response to current growth pressures at work within the County and related concerns about mitigating the effects of sprawl with smart growth practices, it is perhaps not surprising that many survey participants scored images of sidewalks and neighborhood traffic calming elements, such as landscaped medians, among the most desirable in the transportation category. In contrast, images of high volume, strip commercial corridors and vast surface parking lots received low scores.

## Profile of Survey Respondents

Basic demographic questions were included as part of the survey in order to create a simple profile of survey participants. This profile provided a valuable perspective from which the data could be analyzed. For instance, one of the questions asked participants where they lived, which helped determine whether participants were equally distributed throughout the county or tended to cluster in one area. The results of the demographic questions are compiled below:

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Average Age:</b>  | 3% between 19-30 years old<br>18% between 30-45 years old<br>24% between 45-55 years old<br>17% between 55-65 years old<br>35% 65 and older      |
| <b>Gender:</b>       | 52% Male, 44% Female   |
| <b>Household:</b>    | 16% One person per house<br>48% Two people per house<br>12% Three people per house<br>11% Four people per house<br>8% Five or more               |
| <b>Work:</b>         | 14% At home<br>20% Within 10 minutes of home<br>8% Elsewhere in Columbia County<br>23% Outside Columbia County<br>32% Not applicable             |
| <b>Live:</b>         | 53% Martinez-Evans<br>6% Harlem/Grovetown<br>27% Appling<br>2% Clarks Hill Lake Area<br>7% Outside Columbia County                               |
| <b>Housing Type:</b> | 71% Single-family house<br>4% Apartment<br>1% Townhouse/Condo<br>4% Manufactured Home<br>2% Assisted living Facility<br>16% Retirement Community |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Length of Time as County Resident, if applicable:</b> | 5% Less than a year<br>17% 2-5 years<br>17% 6-10 years<br>11% 11-20 years<br>40% More than 20 years                   |
| <b>Reason for choosing to live in Columbia County:</b>   | 45% Quality of life<br>16% Proximity to family<br>13% Schools<br>7% Proximity to job<br>4% Affordability<br>20% Other |

## ■ Focus Area Workshops

Another critical component in the planning process was a series of three Focus Area Workshops, or “community design charrettes,” held in early March 2000. Each of the workshops was tailored to a specific area of the county: (1) Martinez-Evans, (2) Appling-Clarks Hill Lake, and (3) Grovetown-Harlem. At the workshops community residents rolled up their sleeves, put pen to paper and worked side by side with local business leaders, government representatives and fellow neighbors to create a vision for Columbia County. The format for the workshops began with a presentation of the *Compass* survey results, followed by an exploration of national design trends and regional models for smart growth and development. Participants explored urban design preferences, evaluated potential development patterns, and identified options to enhance the existing physical, economic and social environment. The result was a series of urban design maps reflecting the community’s vision for each focus area. These area-specific maps were synthesized into a comprehensive “Development Opportunities Map” which is included in Chapter 9: Land Use.

While all workshop participants expressed similar concerns about growth pressures, as well as interest in the preservation of open space, each focus area tended to have issues distinctly its own. In Martinez-Evans, for example, the prevailing theme related to strategies dealing with sprawl and land use conflicts. Residents in established neighborhoods in Martinez-Evans feel threatened by commercial development in close proximity to their homes. While the notion of walkable communities was appealing to them, they supported the concept of more stringent design guidelines to encourage, or even regulate, landscape buffers between commercial areas and residential neighborhoods as well as architectural styles that are compatible with the traditional character of the area. There was strong support for new sidewalks in this part of the County and the use of impact fees as an appropriate implementation mechanism. With more and more new development projects being proposed every day in this already established area, residents were interested in finding locations for neighborhood-scale pocket parks that would have passive recreational uses such as playgrounds, walking paths and benches.

In the Clarks Hill Lake area the focus of workshop participants was on protecting the rights of property owners while still preserving the rural character of the area and valuable natural resources such as Heggie’s Rock, Gross Place Road and the lakefront. Greater year-round access to the lake was an important concept as well as the possible long-term potential of creating a lodge with individual cabins at Wildwood Park in order to provide a regional recreational destination for corporate retreats within the County. The provision of County services, particularly water and sewer, was a primary concern of many residents in this area. Based on its rich his-

tory, Appling was identified as the symbolic County seat and there was consensus for implementing urban design enhancements that would protect and promote its unique identity and historic character.

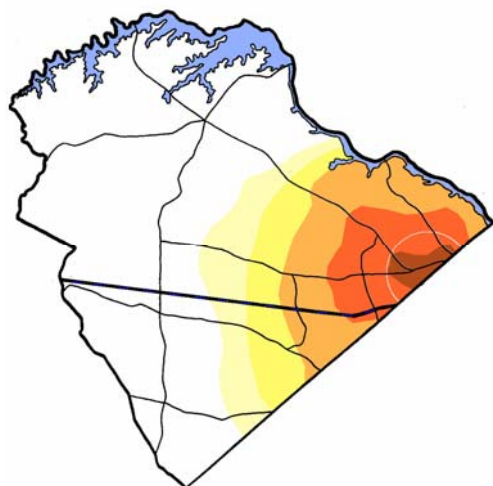
Finally, in the Harlem-Grovetown area, workshop participants were concerned with improving the quality of affordable housing and upgrading roads. This area is most impacted by the County's industrial growth and associated increase in truck traffic. In response, residents are looking for ways to mitigate the negative impacts on their quality of life while still encouraging economic development. Similar to the Clarks Hill Lake area, there was strong support for more County services, such as water and sewer, as well as small-scale passive parks in lieu of large-scale recreational facilities.

The most significant outcome of the workshop process, in terms of a vision for future growth, was the preference for a proactive strategy of directed development that would target specific areas of the county as locations for future expansion. Participants at all three workshops arrived at this consensus through a lively debate that focused on a comparison of potential development patterns. The impact of different development strategies on land use, housing and transportation were presented to the group through comparative images and associated descriptions highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each. The examples shown tended to represent either end of the spectrum and can be characterized simply as the "Dispersed Growth Model" and the "Focused Growth Model." While the majority preferred the "Focused Growth Model", it was acknowledged that this development approach presents inherent challenges when applied to already urbanized areas of the county. There was consensus that the focus of smart growth initiatives in such densely developed areas should be more on linking established uses and enhancing the visual appeal of the public environment. In contrast, the less developed areas of the county present greater opportunities for implementing a "Focused Growth Model."

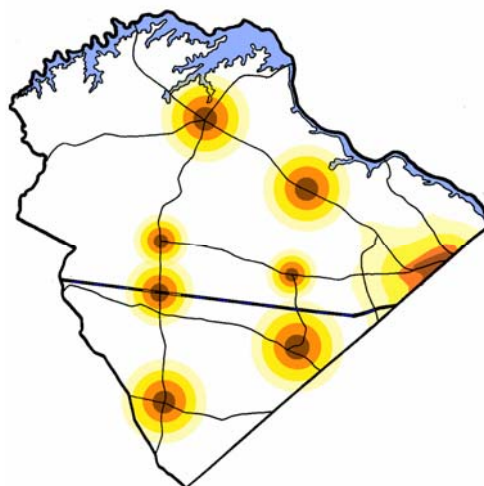
## Comparison of Potential Development Patterns

|                          | DISPERSED GROWTH MODEL  | FOCUSED GROWTH MODEL  |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| POPULATION               | Lower densities throughout  | Higher densities in strategic locations   |
| LAND USE                 | More segregated, easily buffered;<br>Market Driven  | More integrated; Helps direct market  |
| HOUSING                  | More dispersed development, Scattered,<br>isolated housing types  | More concentrated development<br>Integration of housing types   |
| ECONOMIC<br>DEVELOPMENT  | New retail development opportunities  | Greater accessibility for retail services   |
| NATURAL<br>RESOURCES     | Environmental challenges; Large open<br>spaces on periphery   | Greater protection of natural. resources<br>More accessible large open space  |
| HISTORIC<br>RESOURCES    | Protection for identified resources   | More compatibility with new<br>development  |
| COMMUNITY<br>FACILITIES  | Large service districts ;Community<br>facilities as service centers   | More efficient public safety service<br>Community facilities as focal points  |
| TRANSPORTATION           | More auto-oriented ;More<br>congestion/fewer options Increased #<br>of longer vehicle trips; Fewer, larger<br>roads | Encourage pedestrians, bikes, transit<br>Less congestion/greater options;<br>Shorter vehicle trips Numerous, smaller<br>roads |
| URBAN DESIGN             | Opportunities for physical improvement  | Increased reliance on urban design  |
| PUBLIC<br>INFRASTRUCTURE | Less expensive short-term; More<br>expensive long-term  | More expensive short-term; Less<br>expensive long-term  |

## Development Pattern Comparison: GROWTH AREAS



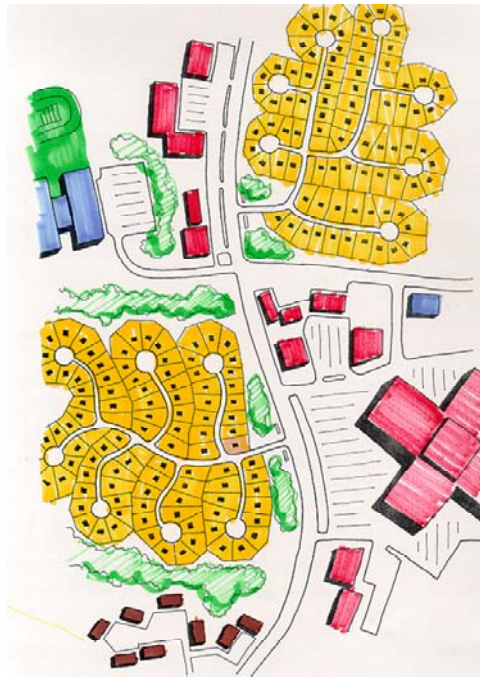
*Dispersed Growth Model*



*Focused Growth Model*



## Development Pattern Comparison: LAND USE

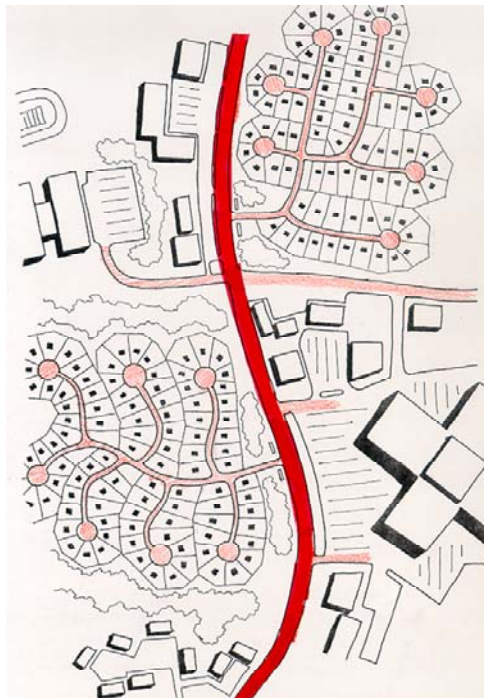


*Dispersed Growth Model*

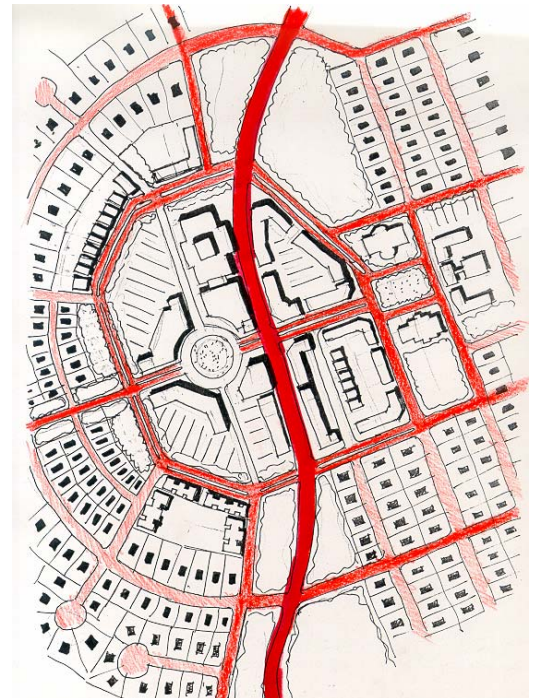


*Focused Growth Model*

## Development Pattern Comparison: TRANSPORTATION



*Dispersed Growth Model*



*Focused Growth Model*





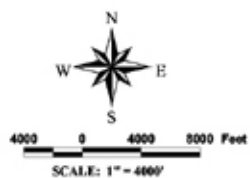


## Columbia County

### Development Opportunities

#### LEGEND

- County Boundaries
- City Boundaries
- Parcel Boundaries
- Lakes and Ponds
- Rivers and Streams
- Primary Roads
- Proposed Roads
- Bike and Pedestrian Facilities
- Other Recreation
- Parks
- Schools
- P. U. D. 's
- Urbanized Area
- Institutional Lands
- Commercial Centers
- Neighborhood Centers
- Town Centers



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